

## ***FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet***

**Meeting Date:** August 2, 2012

**Agenda Item:** Proposed 2012 Late Season Migratory Bird Regulations

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Approval of Proposed Rule

**Time for this Presentation:** 20 minutes

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**Background:** Late season migratory bird hunting regulations pertain to ducks, geese, swans, and coots. Montana participates in both the Central and Pacific Flyways and adheres to the federal frameworks established by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the flyway councils. Frameworks are based on population status from winter surveys for geese and May population and habitat surveys for ducks. Duck seasons are developed with an adaptive harvest approach with three specific regulation packages (restrictive, moderate, liberal) based on pond counts and mallard breeding populations. Recent habitat conditions and population numbers are favorable allowing liberal season frameworks. May duck surveys revealed record numbers of ducks, 43 percent above the long-term average, although pond counts were down from 2011.

In response to Commission discussion and direction at the July meeting, three options are proposed for consideration and are generally described below. Proposed season elements and pros/cons are detailed in the attachments.

- 1) No change from the 2011 framework – no breaks within the season dates.
- 2) End of season split – Close the Central Flyway duck and goose seasons two days early and then re-open together on one of the following weekends in January. Otherwise, season elements would remain similar to 2011
- 3) Mid-season split – Close the Central Flyway goose season seasons during Nov 11 - 17, and then re-open the season(s) extending the close later in January.

In addition the Commission may consider adding a spring white goose season in the Central Flyway. The spring season could be added or not added with any of the three options above. By federal rule, this would require additional hunter surveys and would likely represent only limited opportunity.

Federal frameworks are not yet finalized. Bag limits for canvasbacks and redheads may change in the final federal framework, and those changes would be included in the final FWP proposal. The scaup season was extended, and scaup bag limits were increased. Bag limits for geese were liberalized by the Commission in February and those changes are included here.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** The public comment period on any adopted proposal will run through 5 p.m., Monday, August 27, with final adoption at the August 30 Commission meeting.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** The above options are available for consideration. At risk in the pursuit of more late season opportunity is lost opportunity in November.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** The status quo season is considered by FWP to represent the most consistent opportunity for late season waterfowl hunting across years and FWP anticipates potentially substantial public dissatisfaction with any closed period during the fall. Spring white goose hunters would likely have very low success and would require additional survey efforts by FWP.

**Proposed Motion:** Commission may adopt one or all options for public comment.

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